**“The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility.” Evaluate this claim.**

Knowledge is a medium in its own. It can be gained, shared and proven wrong sometimes. Knowledge, biologically speaking, is an arrangement of electrical signals stored by the brain. This data can be recalled and processed, not just by humans. It is known that at least humans are affected by emotions and past experiences, our knowledge and what we choose to believe will be influenced by these traits. Humans have complex ways to gain and share knowledge, to learn more about the world we live in and our surroundings. Scientific research has lead to astonishing changes in how we live today compared to a couple of centuries ago. During this frantic search for answers, individual people have made important progress in many different areas. These individuals who discovered knowledge, had the decision to make whether or not to release their findings, and if they did what would the implications be to society.

During World War II the nuclear bomb was being developed by the American’s, trying to out run the German’s who initiated the project just before the war.1 Albert Einstein, and other scientists, sent a letter to then President Franklin D. Roosevelt explaining the situation in Nazi Germany.2 He mentions “that it may become possible to set up a nuclear chain reaction in a large mass of uranium, by which vast amounts of power would be generated”, “extremely powerful bombs of a new type may thus be constructed.”. This letter led to the beginning of the arms race, and ultimately to the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In hindsight Albert Einstein regarded sending this letter as “the greatest mistake” of his life.2 Einstein was not the only one who regretted his decision of working with nuclear power, several of the scientists who successfully created the atom bomb “signed petitions against losing the monster they had created”.1 Their knowledge and their participation in the project had unforeseen consequences. Robert Oppenheimer, who managed and organised the entire project, quoted a remembered fragment from the Bhagavad Gita after detonation. "I am become Death," he said, "the destroyer of worlds."1 The possession of knowledge, in this case had extreme impacts on almost the entire world but mostly those who had to suffer from the aftermath of the battle for nuclear supremacy. This is by no means an ethical way of using ones knowledge, although it may be argued that the war would not have ended otherwise, possibly causing even more death and destruction. This example of how the possession and usage of knowledge affects other people and shapes our history, demonstrates the ethical implications of knowledge being used. Whether or not it was used responsibly is another question.

Responsibility is defined as: “the state or fact of having a duty to deal with something or of having control over someone; the state or fact of being accountable or to blame for something; the opportunity or ability to act independently and make decisions without authorization”. 3 From this definition I deduct that a knowledgeable individual has a duty to resolve problems for which they know the answer to, and that if their solutions should fail, they can be blamed. Being responsible also means that this individual may act alone without permission. An example of this in the modern world would be a fire fighter. Is he or she obliged to put out a fire since they have the knowledge of how to do so in the best possible way? It depends upon the individual fire fighter. His or her ethics may differ from other people, and the effects of their decision must also be clear for them to judge what actions to take. It may also be that not from his knowledge, but from his choice of job that he has committed himself to the task.

From these two examples the original statement that “The possession of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility.” can definitely be considered to be true. In both cases the individuals can be held responsible for their actions, they also acted on their own behalf. Historic events will also shape individuals and the decisions they make. In hindsight the creation of the atomic bomb or not putting out a fire can be seen as a mistake and something that is unlikely to occur again in the future.

I will now consider the opposite to the original statement, that the possession of knowledge does not carry an ethical responsibility. In this case individuals who posses knowledge cannot be blamed for their actions and the knowledge they have may not be judged. As an example I will take a student who has the knowledge of the exact questions and answers to the next exam. Depending on his ethics he has several choices of how to apply this knowledge, the student can tell the other students about the test and ensure that they all pass, if they decide to accept this knowledge, or inform the teacher about his knowledge to allow the exam to be altered. Either decision can be seen as ethical or unethical depending on the standpoint of the person; a student will likely agree to share the information with other students while the teachers would disagree with this.

In all the mentioned cases I think that the knowledge itself is not the factor why individual people are held responsible but how the person applied the knowledge. Theoretically knowing how to build a nuclear bomb does no harm to anyone and is ethical in my opinion. Constructing a nuclear bomb exclusively for the purpose of killing many people is unethical though. Knowing how to fight a fire and choosing to fight the fire leads me to the same conclusion, learning how to fight a fire can be done by anyone If they decide to do so. Just because a person chose to be a fire fighter does not mean he is responsible for putting out every fire, if he choses to not do so and let people die he will be judged as being unethical, because he did not apply the knowledge. The student as well would not be considered unethical for knowing about the test if he does not share the information with anyone as no one will ever know he possessed the knowledge.

In conclusion I say that the possession of knowledge does not carry an ethical responsibility. In order to make the statement correct I would alter it to: “the application of knowledge carries an ethical responsibility”. Every individual can choose for himself what to do with their knowledge.